

## Message Text

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O R 070929Z JUL 78  
FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6005  
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA  
AMEMBASSY MANILA  
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE  
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 KUALA LUMPUR 6718

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, MY  
SUBJ: MALAYSIAN ELECTIONS

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1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY. THE MALAYSIAN PEOPLE  
GO TO THE POLLS JULY 8 TO ELECT A FEDERAL PARLIAMENT  
AND STATE ASSEMBLIES FOR THE FIFTH TIME SINCE  
INDEPENDENCE IN 1957. THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN  
MALAYSIA, WHILE PERHAPS NOT A MODEL BY WESTERN  
LIBERAL STANDARDS, IS NEVERTHELESS ONE OF THE  
FEW GENUINE FUNCTIONING DEMOCRACIES IN THE THIRD  
WORLD, AND ITS ELECTIONS BEAR WATCHING. FOR THE  
REASONS CITED REFTELS, THE RULING NATIONAL FRONT  
WILL ONCE AGAIN RETAIN CONTROL OF THE FEDERAL  
GOVERNMENT AND PROBABLY ALL OF THE STATE ASSEMBLIES,  
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BUT THE ELECTIONS WILL DECIDE THE POLITICAL FATE  
OF CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS, WILL ONCE AGAIN TEST THE  
STABILITY OF THIS MULTI-RACIAL NATION'S SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT,  
WILL GIVE PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN HIS OWN  
POLITICAL MANDATE, AND WILL SET THE COURSE FOR  
FUTURE GOM POLICIES. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

2. SINCE NOMINATION DAY ON JUNE 21, THE CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN A SUBDUED ONE FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS. THE BAN ON PUBLIC RALLIES HAS DAMPENED THE AIR OF EXCITEMENT CHARACTERISTIC OF PREVIOUS MALAYSIAN ELECTIONS, AND A PROFUSION OF ELECTION POSTERS IS THE ONLY PUBLIC SIGN OF A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN. ALTHOUGH THE RULING NATIONAL FRONT (NF) AS A PARTY AND ITS LEADERS HAVE READY ACCESS TO THE MEDIA, INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATES MUST NOW MAKE DO WITH SMALL INDOOR GATHERINGS AND HOUSE-TO-HOUSE CANVASSING TO GET THEIR MESSAGE ACROSS. BECAUSE CERTAIN RACIALLY SENSITIVE ISSUES HAVE BEEN FORBIDDEN FROM PUBLIC DISCUSSION SINCE THE COMMUNAL RIOTS OF 1969, THAT MESSAGE MUST NECESSARILY BE A MUTED ONE. FINALLY, THE GOM-DOMINATED MEDIA HAVE OVERWHELMINGLY FAVORED THE NF IN THEIR ELECTION COVERAGE; THIS HAS MEANT THAT ELECTION COVERAGE HAS GENERALLY BEEN LIMITED TO THE REPORTING OF REPETITIOUS SPEECHES BY A HANDFUL OF SENIOR GOM OFFICIALS OR PRO-NF "ANALYSES" OF VARIOUS STATES OR INDIVIDUAL RACES. EVEN THE RADIO TIME DEVOTE TO FORMAL ELECTIONEERING WAS DIVIDED 70 PERCENT FOR THE NF AND 30 PER CENT FOR THE COMBINED OPPOSITION (AND THE ISLAMIC PARTY --PAS-- DECIDED TO FOREGO ITS ALLOTTED TIME IN PROTEST).

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3. THE RESTRAINED CAMPAIGN HAS LED MANY OBSERVERS TO COMMENT TO US THAT, UNLIKE IN PREVIOUS ELECTIONS, THEY DO NOT HAVE A FEEL FOR THE MOOD OF THE ELECTORATE AND CANNOT PREDICT IN DETAIL HOW THE ELECTION WILL GO. NONE OF THEM QUESTION WHETHER THE NF WILL WIN DECISIVELY, BUT THEY DO NOT KNOW HOW WELL, IN A RELATIVE SENSE, THE OPPOSITION WILL FARE. VOTER APATHY IS ALSO EXPECTED TO BE A RESULT OF THE UNINSPIRED CAMPAIGNING. MOST OBSERVERS THINK THIS WOULD WORK TO THE DISADVANTAGE OF THE NF, AN IRONIC DEVELOPMENT IN VIEW OF GOM EFFORTS TO PLAY DOWN THE CAMPAIGN.

4. ALL PARTIES CONTESTING THE ELECTION HAVE ISSUED CAREFULLY PREPARED MANIFESTOS LAYING OUT A SERIES OF LOFTY ISSUES. THE NF MANIFESTO FOCUSES ON PEACE (I.E. RACIAL HARMONY) STABILITY AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY. THE MAJOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION PARTY (DAP) ISSUES ARE THE PRESERVATION OF DEMOCRACY AGAINST NF DESIGNS TO CREATE A ONE-PARTY STATE, THE ELIMINATION OF CLASS EXPLOITATION, EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL, ELIMINATION OF CORRUPTION AND

THE RESTORATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. THE PAS MANIFESTO STRESSES RELIGIOUS ISSUES AND PLEDGES THE INTRODUCTION OF ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES INTO THE GOVERNING PROCESS.

5. HOWEVER, FEW PEOPLE READ THESE MANIFESTOS, AND A DECIDEDLY DIFFERENT SET OF ISSUES IS EMPHASIZED BOTH IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE VOTERS AND TO A CERTAIN EXTENT IN THE SPEECHES REPORTED IN THE PRESS. BOTH THE NF AND THE OPPOSITION HAVE SPENT A GOOD DEAL OF THEIR ENERGY CRITICIZING THEIR OPPONENTS' CAMPAIGN PRACTICES. THIS IS MOST COMMON, OF COURSE, FOR OPPOSITION CANDIDATES IN VIEW OF THE GOM DOMINATION OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, BUT  
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THE NF HAS BEEN VOCIFEROUS IN CONDEMNING THE "UNHOLY ALLIANCE" OF PAS AND THE DAP (I.E., PASS FIELDING A CANDIDATE IN A CHINESE MAJORITY CONSTITUENCY TO DRAW MALAY VOTES FROM THE NF, USUALLY

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6006  
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
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AMEMBASSY MANILA  
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MCA, CANDIDATE IN ORDER TO INSURE A DAP WIN, AND VICE VERSA IN A MALAY AREA); UMNO HAS ALSO CONDEMNED PAS FOR USING RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS AND KORANIC QUOTATIONS FOR PARTISAN POLITICAL PURPOSES. A MAJOR THEME OF NF SPEECHES, ONLY HINTED AT IN THE MANIFESTO, HAS BEEN TO RAISE THE SPECTER OF A REPETITION OF THE RACIAL RIOTING OF 1969 IF THE COMMUNAL OPPOSITION PARTIES RECEIVE A HEAVY VOTE. BECAUSE MALAYSIA NOW HAS NO ELECTIVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT IT IS COMMON FOR CANDIDATES TO CONCENTRATE ON--OR TO BE FACED WITH--MUNDANE LOCAL ISSUES DURING HOUSE-TO-HOUSE CAMPAIGNING; THE QUESTION OF WHO HAS "SERVED" OR "NEGLECTED" A CONSTITUENCY IN TERMS OF RESOLVING INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINTS MAY BE THE MOST SALIENT ISSUE IN MANY AREAS. FINALLY, THE TYPE OF ISSUE PROBABLY MOST WIDESPREAD BUT LEAST REPORTED IN THE MEDIA IS THE PERSONAL ATTACK BY ONE CANDIDATE ON THE INTEGRITY OF HIS OPPONENT. ONLY IN THE LAST FEW DAYS OF THE CAMPAIGN HAVE REFLECTIONS OF THIS KIND OF CAMPAIGNING SURFACED IN THE RIGHTEOUS PROTESTATIONS OF THE VICTIMS OF THE MOST VICIOUS OF THESE ATTACKS.

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6. DETAILED PREDICATION OF THE ELECTION OUTCOME IS DIFFICULT FOR SEVERAL REASONS. THERE ARE NOT SCIENTIFIC POLITICAL POLLS; PUBLISHED PREDICIONS ARE BASED ON "COFFEEHOUSE SURVEYS" AND ARE GENERALLY BIASED TOWARD THE NF. AFTER THE BAD DEFEAT OF PAS IN THE MARCH STATE ELECTION IN KELANTAN, FEW OBSERVERS CLAIM TO HAVE A FEEL FOR THE PARTY'S STRENGTH AMONG ITS TRADITIONAL RURAL MALAY CONSTITUENCY. AS NOTED ABOVE, THE SUBDUED CAMPAIGN WITH THE ABSENCE OF RALLIES MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO GAUGE THE RELATIVE POPULARITY OF INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATES. FINALLY, THE ELECTORATE HAS INCREASED FROM APPROXIMATELY 4 MILLION TO ABOUT 5 MILLION SINCE THE LAST ELECTION IN 1974 AND THE VOTING BEHAVIOUR OF 20 PER CENT OF THE POPULATION IS THUS UNTESTED. INCUMBENTS IN PARTICULAR ARE UNEASY ABOUT LACK OF A FEEDBACK MECHANISM TO GAUGE POPULAR SENTIMENT. DESPITE THESE CONSTRAINTS IT IS POSSIBLE TO HAZARD A FEW GUESSES ABOUT THE OUTCOME OF THE JULY 8 POLLING.

7. IN PARLIAMENT THE NF HELD ALL BUT 24 SEATS BEFORE THE ELECTION: DAP HAD 8 SEATS, PAS 13, PEKEMAS ONE AND THE SOCIALIST DEMOCRATIC PARTY ONE; THERE WAS ONE INDEPENDENT. THE DAP SHOULD HAVE A NET GAIN OF UP TO FIVE SEATS AND SMALL PARTIES OR INDEPENDENTS MIGHT PICK UP ABOUT THE SAME. PAS WILL PROBABLY SEE SOME EROSION OF ITS STRENGTH, BUT, AS NOTED ABOVE, IT IS HARD TO TELL WITH ANY CERTAINTY HOW THE PARTY WILL DO. THUS, THE OPPOSITION, BY CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE IS EXPECTED TO HAVE ABOUT 30 - 35 OF THE 154 SEATS IN THE NEXT PARLIAMENT. THE BOTTOMLINE ESTIMATE CITED BY NF CAMPAIGN MANAGERS IS 100 SEATS FOR THE NF; THEY CLEARLY WOULD BE DISAPPOINTED TO WIN LESS THAN

THE TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY NECESSARY TO ENACT CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS.

8. GOM LEADERS WHOSE SEATS ARE SAID TO BE IN DANGER INCLUDE  
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MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO RICHARD HO, DEPUTY PRIMARY INDUSTRIES MINISTER PAUL LEONG, DEPUTY LOCAL GOVERNMENT MINISTER S. SUBRAMANIAM, DEPUTY MINISTER OF WORKS AND UTILITIES GOH CHENG TEIK, DEPUTY TRADE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER MANAN OTHMAN, UMNO SECRETARY GENERAL SENU ABDUL RAHMAN, AND, DEPENDING ON THE STRENGTH OF THE NEW PAJAR PARTY IN SARAWAK (WHICH WE HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO JUDGE), DEPTUY HEALTH MINISTER SULEIMAN DAUD AND, PERHAPS, PRIMARY INDUSTRIES MINISTER TAIB MAHMUD.

9. ALL OF THE STATE ASSEMBLIES WILL PROBABLY GO TO THE NF, BUT CLOSE RACES ARE EXPECTED IN KEDAH, WHERE PAS HAS BEEN STRONG FOR ABOUT TEN YEARS AND WHERE IT IS NOW MAKING ITS MAJOR EFFORT, AND IN PERAK, WHERE DAP HELD 11 OF 42 SEATS IN THE LAST ASSEMBLY AND WHERE THE "UNHOLY ALLIANCE" OF PAS AND DAP HAS ITS BEST CHANCE OF SUCCESS (BOTH PARTIES ARE FIELDING LARGE SLATES AND DAP IS MAKING ITS STRONGEST EFFORT HERE). IN PENANG THE ONLY CERTAINTY IS THAT UMNO WILL DO WELL WITH ITS 11 CANDIDATES (OUT OF 27 SEATS), BUT THE CHINESE PARTIES IN BOTH THE NF AND THE OPPOSITION ARE RENT BY PERSONALITY AND FACTIONAL DISPUTES AND MOST RACES IN THESE REMAINING 16 SEATS HAVE THREE OR FOUR CANDIDATES; THE NF WILL PROBABLY PUT TOGETHER A GOVERNMENT BUT IT IS HARD TO SAY WHAT ITS CHINESE COMPONENT WILL LOOK LIKE. OF THE OTHER STATES ONLY IN SELANGOR, NEGRI SEMBILAN AND TRENGGANU DOES THE OPPOSITION HAVE A CHANCE OF DOING REASONABLY WELL, BUT PRACTICALLY NO CHANCE OF WINNING.

10. WE WILL BE LOOKING AT THE ELECTION RESULTS  
TO ANSWER A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS. THE MOST IM-

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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6007

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 KUALA LUMPUR 6718

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PORTANT IS:HOW STRONG WILL PRIME MINISTER  
HUSSEINONN'S NEW GOVERNMENT BE? THERE IS NO  
QUESTIN THAT HUSSEINIS LOOKING FOR A PERSONAL  
MANDATE. THE NF CAMPAIGN LEANS HEAVILY ON HIM;  
HE HAS PERSONALLY DELIVERED MOST OF THE NF ELECTORAL  
PRONOUNCEMENTS AND THE CORNERSTONE OF THE NF  
CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN UNITY UNDER HUSSEIN ONN. A  
BIG WIN, EVEN WITH SOME MINIMAL EROSION IN NF  
STRENGTH, WILL ALLOW HUSSEIN TO PURSE VIGOROUSLY  
THE PRAGAMATIC POLICIES HE BEGAN ON TAKING OVER  
FROM TUN RAZAK IN 1976; RACIAL MODERATION, ENCOURAGE-  
MENT OF PRIVATE DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN INVEST-  
MENT, A MODERATELY PRO-WESTERN, IF NOMINALLY NON-  
ALIGNED,FOREIGN POLICY. IF THE OPPOSITION,  
HOWEVER, ESPECIALLY PAS, SHOULD DO BETTER THAN  
EXPECTED, THE GOM MIGHT FEEL ITSELF UNDER PRESSURE  
TO BE LESS ACCOMODATING TO THE INTERSTS OF THE  
NON-MALAYS OR MORE ACTIVELY INVOLVED, FOR INSTANCE,  
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IN THE PLIGHT OF MUSLIM MINORITIES IN THAILAND  
AND THE PHILIPPINES. A PARTICULARLY STRONG SHOWING  
BY THE DAP COULD, IRONICALLY, HAVE MUCH THE SAME  
EFFECT DOMESTICALLY SINCE THE MALAY COMMUNITY COULD  
DEMAND"PROTECTION" FROM THE GOM AGAINST WHAT  
IT PERCEIVES AS THE GROWING POLITICAL POWER OF THE  
NON-MALAYS.

1.. A PEACEFUL ELECTION, AND ALL SIGNS POINT  
IN THAT DIRECTION, WILL REAFFIRM THE STABILITY  
AND THE VIABILITY OF THE MALAYSIAN POLITICAL  
SYSTEM. MORE SPECIFICALLY, THE ELECTIONS WILL  
SHOW WHETHER THE RESURGENCE OF FUNDAMENTALIST  
ISLAM HAS HAD ANY POLITICAL EFFECT. WE HAVE NOTED  
A RETURN TO RELIGION AMONG YOUNG MALAYS, MANY OF

THEM NEWLY ARRIVED FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE INTO THE CITIES; THE SUCCESS OF PAS AMONG THESE NEW VOTERS IN THE ELECTIN SHOULD HELP INDICATE WHETHER OR NOT THE NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT POSES A POLITICAL THREAT TO SECULARIST MALAY PARTY IN THE NF, THE UNITED MALAYS NATIONAL ORGANIZATIN (UMNO), AS MANY UMNO LEADERS FEAR.

1. FINALLY, HUSSEIN ONN WILL FORM HIS OWN GOVERNMENT AFTER THE ELCTIONS. VIRTUALLY THE ENTIRE CABINET FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS HAS BEEN THE ONE HUSSEIN INHERITED FROM TUN RAZAK, ALTHOUGH SOME PORTFOLIOS HAVE CHANGED AND SEVERAL NEW JUNIOR MEMBERS ADDED. HUSSEIN COULD WELL MOVE NOW TO PUT HIS OWN MEN IN, ALTHOUGH HE MIGHT WELL NAME AN INTERIM CABINET JUST AFTER THE ELECTINS AND WAIT UNTIL THE UMNO GENERAL ASSEMBLY IS OVER (A SEPTEMBER DATE HAS BEEN MENTIONED  
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FOR THE ASSEMBLY) BEFORE NAMING HIS FINAL CABINET. THE PERSONALITIES NAMED TO THE CABINET SHOULD PROVIDE A FURTHER INDICAATION OF POLICIES HUSSEIN INTENDS TO PURSUE DURING THE NEXT FIVE YEARS.  
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